

September 7, 2010

MEDIA, PA - Congressman Joe Sestak dispatched a letter to the President expressing his strong support for this past week's bilateral peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The letter encouraged President Obama to provide leadership throughout this process without attempting to mandate terms – as terms can only properly be arrived at through negotiations between the two parties.

“President Obama should be commended for bringing the two parties together for direct talks – the first in nearly two years. Having visited Israel more than half a dozen times during my Naval career, I believe that the Israelis serve as a vital ally to the United States and that the unique U.S.-Israeli friendship must be preserved and strengthened for generations to come,” said the Congressman.

“It is my firm belief that the successful negotiation of a two state solution will advance Israel's security in the region. However, a lasting peace may only be reached through the give and take of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. I asked President Obama to consider this, and to encourage President Mubarak and King Abdullah to provide strong leadership among the Arab states as this process continues. Israel will only take risks for peace if its security is ensured, and this requires a regional commitment to Israel's right to peacefully exist alongside its neighbors,” said the Congressman.

The Congressman's letter to the President follows –

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write to commend you and your administration on facilitating the resumption of bilateral talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Only by negotiating directly with each other—without preconditions—can Israeli and Palestinian leaders hope to resolve the difficult issues that separate them. I share your hope that these talks will lead to a real and long-lasting peace between Israel, the Palestinians, and the wider Arab world. After 62 years of conflict, it is time for Israel's neighbors to finally accept the existence of the Jewish state of Israel, for a peaceful and prosperous Middle East.

The United States has a critical role to play in helping to facilitate these negotiations, but ultimately, for any agreement to succeed, the parties themselves must decide and agree on its terms. They are the ones who must engage in the give and take of the negotiating process. They are the ones who must implement and live with the results of an agreement, and therefore, imposed solutions will never be lasting ones. America cannot impose a rigid agenda for the talks or a US-authored solution. The need for the US to work closely with and be sensitive to the needs of our ally Israel is critical. Israel, after all, will inevitably be the one asked to take the greatest security risks in any agreement.

Arab states have repeatedly stated how important it is to them to see a resolution to this conflict, and yet many of their actions suggest otherwise. Most have yet to make a real effort to normalize relations with Israel; there has been no end to the anti-Israel rhetoric at international institutions; we see unyielding anti-Israel incitement in their media; and attempts to bolster Palestinian President Abbas or to financially support the PA have been inadequate. In fact, the PA has seen a dramatic decrease in Arab funding this year, creating serious financial problems for them. I am pleased that you invited President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and King Abdullah II of Jordan to Washington for the summit this week. I hope that throughout the process you will stress to them that they and their Arab neighbors have serious responsibilities in this process and urge both of them to provide leadership in bringing about a lasting peace.

No doubt the road ahead is a long and difficult one. The meetings this week are just a first step in what will be a strenuous, but crucial, journey. I wish you the best and, in the face of adversity, urge you to maintain these principles in the coming weeks to ensure that talks resume later this month without losing momentum gained the last few days of the initial discussions. I look forward to supporting this effort with you on these critical issues in the months ahead.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Warmly,

Joe Sestak
Member of Congress

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.

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